

Old State Bank Building  
Decatur, Alabama.

*Morgan Co.*

ALA  
HABS No. 16-348.

HABS  
ALA  
52-DECA  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 16.

Historic American Buildings Survey  
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer  
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

ALA  
Project #~~13~~ 348  
OLD STATE BANK BUILDING  
Decatur, Alabama

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HISTORICAL DATA:

Built about 1830.

Architect: No RECORD

Cost of Building: ~~More than \$100,000.00~~

MATERIALS OF CONSTRUCTION: 2 STORY BRICK, STONE COLUMNS

Ownership:

The Branch Bank of the State of Alabama at Decatur, erected under President Andrew Jackson's state bank ideal.

After the abandonment of the State Banking system by the National Government, the apartment (on the second floor of the building, where the president of the Branch Bank had lived) was used as a private residence.

From 1881 to 1902 the structure was occupied by the First National Bank of Decatur.

Dr. J. Y. Cantwell (the great grand-uncle of the present Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace) bought the property in 1902. He also occupied the apartment.

Mrs. W. B. Edmondson, a grand niece of Dr. Cantwell, and a member of his household, was the next owner of this old bank building.

The City of Decatur owns this old bank building. Mrs. W. B. Edmondson presented the building to the City of Decatur, 1934, to be used as a municipal center and museum.

Stone Columns:

Five massive stone columns adorn the front of the building. They were quarried from Trinity Mountain, eight miles away, by slaves belonging to the bank president, James Fennell. From an old story we have learned that about sixteen yokes of oxen were required to move these huge stone pillars. The man who had the contract for the setting up of the columns reported that he received \$40,000 for the work, and went bankrupt at that figure. 2

Dedication of Building:

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#### Dedication of Building:

The dedication of this structure proved a gala occasion. Among the notables present was Martin Van Buren, President of the United States. The negroes who had hewn the columns appeared in shades and in a dramatic ceremony were given their freedom by their master for their great accomplishment.

#### James Fennell:

The first president. He oversaw the construction of the building, and his slaves did most of the work.

This bank, under James Fennell, was opened with a capital of \$1,000,000.

#### Civil War Period:

During the War Between the States, the building served as a hospital for wounded soldiers. The columns, colonnades and doorway still bear marks of bombardment from the river and traces of the raking fire of minnie balls.

Tradition explains the very damaged condition of this structure. It is said that a Union payroll amounting to \$250,000 was hidden on the property.

#### "One of the Historic Treasures of Alabama":

These are the words by which John Temple Graves II, in his Book of Alabama and the South, speaks of this old bank building. Around this structure a gorgeous panorama presents itself; a pagentry of ~~of~~ development throughout the Tennessee Valley, high-piled barges, bearing the products of the fertility of the region to the Gulf, a great river traffic with Decatur, reenforced by this potent arm of the Federal Government as its heart.

#### Source of Material:

Eugene Knight of the measuring force.

*Reviewed 1936 H.C.F.*

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ARCHITECTURAL MERIT AND DATA:

This Bank Building is one of the first bank buildings in the State of Alabama, and was measured for this reason, and ~~for~~ to the fact that it was about to be converted into a community club building under the CWA plan, which required extensive alterations. The bank has a rather sturdy use of the Greek Doric; and the square Greek Doric capitals in connection with the use of a round shaft is very unusual indeed. The plainness of the side elevation is in sharp contrast to the ambitiousness of the main facade portico.

Source of Material:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS,  
Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

*Revised 1936, H.C.F.*